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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 ANKARA 004600

SIPDIS

E.O. 12958: DECL: 08/15/2014
TAGS: PREL PTER MOPS TU IZ
SUBJECT: FOLLOW-UP MEETING WITH TURKISH MFA ON TRUCKER
SECURITY ISSUE

REF: A. ANKARA 4529 AND PREVIOUS
     ¶B. EUR/SE EMAIL TO EMB ANKARA 08-13-2004 (NOTAL)

Classified By: DCM Robert S. Deutsch for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

Summary

¶1. (C) Following MFA Deputy U/S Ilkin calling in the DCM (ref
a), MFA Deputy Director General Sakir Fakili held a
preliminary follow-up meeting with emboffs Aug. 13. Fakili
stressed the importance of secure transfer and offload
facilities, enhanced convoy security, and insurance
assistance. He proposed that we attend a larger meeting of
MFA and the major trucking companies and concerned export
associations. MFA officials are unhappy about Iraqi customs
officials and regulations, though these are more related to
the economic interests of the truckers, not their security.
The Turks plan to raise trucker security with IIG President
al-Yawar during his Aug. 16-17 visit to Ankara. End summary.

¶2. (C) MFA Deputy Director General for Bilateral Economic
Relations Sakir Fakili called in Acting EconCouns and
PolMilOff Aug. 13 to discuss GOT proposals to improve the
security situation for Turkish truckers in Iraq (ref A).
Fakili noted that he understood that we did not yet have
guidance from Washington on the Turkish non-paper on this
subject that MFA Deputy Under Secretary Ilkin had handed the
DCM on Aug. 11 (see ref a). As Ilkin's designated POC to the
Embassy on trucker security, Fakili said he simply wanted us
to meet him and his staff and begin to engage in a dialogue
on this matter.

¶3. (C) Fakili said that with the Aug. 2 murder of Turkish
hostage Murat Yuce in Iraq and the continuing press
coverage of kidnappings and attacks on Turkish truckers, this
had become a "humanitarian issue" for the GOT. He
went over what he considered to be three primary steps that
Turkey, the U.S., and/or the Iraqis might do to provide for a
more secure environment:

--the establishment of secure "transfer places" for
offloading, layover, and maintenance of Turkish trucks. He
identified Zahko and the already-established fuel offloading
site 10 km north of Mosul as possible sites. He
said that the major Turkish trucking associations, UND
(International Transporters Association) and RODER, could
play a role in financing these sites.

--reinforcement of convoy protection by coalition forces.
Fakili brought out the oft-repeated Turkish claim that
coalition convoy security consists of only one vehicle
driving far ahead of the convoy. Fakili passed on Turkish
truckers, request that (unless this is the case already)
convoy protection vehicles travel behind or to the side of
their trucks.

--provision of insurance assistance for Turkish drivers and
companies. Fakili said that firms usually cannot
accurately document losses due to terrorism in Iraq, and they
also complain that premiums are now prohibitive. He
noted that the MFA has approached Turkish insurance
companies, requesting that the companies study the
possibility of offering truckers insurance against terrorism
in Iraq.

¶4. (C) Fakili reported that the MFA has met repeatedly over
the past two weeks with the major trucking company
associations (UND and RODER) and major export associations to
discuss their concerns and possible solutions. Fakili
asked that emboffs consider attending such a meeting to hear
directly from the associations. He added that perhaps an
outcome of such a meeting could be an MOU between the USG,
the GOT, and the IIG. While expressing concerns about
participating in a single, large meeting of this type,
emboffs said we would take this back for discussion, and
that we would continue to seek Washington's and Embassy
Baghdad's input. We also pointed out that the security
issue was of course one for the Iraqis as well. Fakili took
the point, noting that of course this was a major
topic for President al-Yawar's visit to Ankara Aug. 16-17.

¶5. (C) Acting EconCouns responded that the USG took the issue
of security for Turkish truckers very seriously, but
highlighted the difficulty for the coalition to reinforce

trucking convoys in the context of the overall security
environment in Iraq. He noted the difficulty of dealing with
this complex problem from Ankara, but repeated our
willingness to work with the GOT and IIG on this matter.
PolMilOff asked some specific questions regarding recent
attacks: Where precisely have the Turkish truckers been
attacked? Were the trucks in coalition-protected convoys at
the time and, if so, under what circumstances? Fakili
admitted that he did not have this information at hand but
thought the truckers' associations might have more detailed
information.

¶6. (C) Fakili responded that he understood the need to work
with the Iraqis, but seemed skeptical about the Iraqi
authorities' ability to handle the issue at hand. He claimed
that Turkey is now number three (behind the U.S. and UK) on
the list of countries who have lost people in Iraq, with 21
deaths and 25-30 unaccounted for. Akif Ayhan, MFA's Head of
Desk for Bilateral Economic Affairs (Fakili's subordinate),
cited reports that Iraqi police had actually handed over at
least one Turkish trucker to the insurgents. Fakili reported
that Turkish-Iraqi trade so far in 2004 had exceeded the US$
one billion estimated for all of 2003; the financial benefit
for Turkish truckers, who can make US$ 1000 for three trips
to Iraq per month, was important.

¶7. (C) Ayhan then launched into a critique of the Iraqi
administration of the border, complaining that Iraq was
about to impose a "severe" limitation on the amount of fuel
Turkish trucks may carry from Iraq back into Turkey.
(Note: Turkish truckers are widely reported to be bringing
fuel into Iraq under coalition contract, but then buying
cheap Iraqi fuel for re-sale in Turkey. In fact, this trade
increases Turkish truckers' risk profile, since they
reportedly leave convoy protection to obtain the Iraqi fuel.
End note.) Ayhan also accused Kurdish IIG customs officials
of imposing arbitrary fees and fines on Turkish truckers; he
claimed that these officials do not enforce Iraqi federal
law, only their own wishes. He added that the weekly border
meetings among IIG, GOT, and coalition personnel are
"insufficient." We asked Ayhan if these issues were really
security-related, and Fakili brought the
subject back to security, closing the meeting by again
requesting us to attend a larger meeting with MFA and the
trucking and export associations.

¶8. (C) Comment: The Turks are anxious to prove to their
public and the press that they are serious about trucker
security, but post notes that both commercial and coalition
traffic from Turkey into Iraq remains at the same level as
before the Aug. 2 Yuce murder and the UND's subsequent call
for a ban on trucking in support of the coalition. The
economic incentives Fakili himself cited in para. six are
simply too strong for the Turks to turn off the tap, but an
increase in violence against Turks in Iraq could affect
public opinion sufficiently to increase the pressure on the
GOT, or could convince a significant number of truckers that
the risks outweigh the gain. Post is not inclined to agree
to MFA's request to attend a large group meeting in Ankara on
this subject, but emboffs could meet with the parties
concerned one-on-one. We cannot imagine what purpose the
suggestion of an MOU would serve.

¶9. (C) Post awaits the Department's guidance in responding to
the Turkish non-paper in ref A. We suggest it is important
to help the GOT appear to be trying to address the risks of
working in Iraq. Any measures to improve security for
Turkish truckers would help assuage Turkish public opinion
and maintain GOT support for trucking and contracting into
Iraq. (Note: Reports reached Ankara Aug. 16 of the
kidnapping of two more Turkish drivers in Iraq engaged in
delivering water for the USG. End note.) End comment.

¶10. (U) Baghdad minimize considered.
EDELMAN